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**EAST TIMOR : A WIN-WIN SOLUTION IN SIGHT?**

by José Ramos Horta*

Six months ago the world was shocked by the tragic scenes of a massacre of East Timorese civilians by Indonesian troops. TV viewers caught a glimpse of the plight the people of East Timor have been enduring, since Indonesian invasion an annexation over 16 years ago thwarted the process of decolonisation of this former Portuguese colony in Southeast Asia. The massacre, and its political aftermath, reminded the international community that this simmering conflict, one of the last remaining left-overs from the Cold War, continued to be a festering source of disharmony, at great cost to all the parties involved. For the people of East Timor the legacy so far has been tragic, allowing for comparisons to be made with the Khmer Rouge holocaust in Cambodia. For Indonesia, who can particularly ill-afford it in view of its own needs, the cost has been severe in terms of military casualties, campaign expenses and international rebuke. The intense diplomatic effort which Indonesia has had to undertake, attempting to mollify condemnation by many nations, could have been expended pursuing goals of greater benefit to its people. Regional relations with neighbouring Australia have been strained, once again, by this issue. Relations between Indonesia and the European Community have suffered, as the various condemnatory resolutions and statements passed have shown. Bilateral relations among EC members and Indonesia have also come under strain in recent months. In the US, the East Timor issue also attracts significant attention and concern. The latest measure expressing American censure is the Bill recently introduced by Congressman Tony Hall of Ohio, calling for an end to the vitally important US aid to Indonesia.

Instead of persevering at past policies, which time has proven fruitless, **a new and constructive approach towards the resolution of this tragic conflict is urgently required, for the benefit of all.** The East Timorese, Indonesians, Australians and the new US-led international world order would all be winners if the present deadlock is broken.

**The peace proposal recently put forward by CNRM, the representative institution for the East Timor nationalist forces,** appears as a possible solution. It reflects the stand of all sections of East Timorese society inside East Timor and abroad, as well as its Catholic Church.

As CNRM's Special Representative, I recently outlined to the European Parliament and to the United Nations our vision of how such a peace process could unfold. **After initial talks leading to cessation of all armed activities in East Timor, a five year period of autonomous rule under Indonesia would follow. During this phase, the duration of which may be extended, East Timor would rule itself in most respects except for foreign relations, which would be conducted by Indonesia.** Ultimately an act of self-determination would determine the final status of East Timor in accordance with the preferences of its population.

Support for the idea of autonomy for East Timor has been growing for some time among a variety of interested sectors in Europe, Australia, Japan and the United States. Parliamentarians, noted academics, human rights and Church groups have consistently expressed enthusiasm for such a possibility, which is seen as a practical way to end the suffering of the East Timorese people and improve their human rights situation.

**Even more significant perhaps is the fact that support for East Timor regional autonomy is increasingly heard inside Indonesia as well. Acknowledging the urgent need for a change of past policy, politicians, religious leaders, academics, media commentators and NGOs are expressing the conviction that such a solution would be far preferable to the continuation of the present situation.** This view appears also to held among a number of Indonesian Government members.

The return of peace would enable East Timorese and Indonesians to concentrate on building our future as members of the harmonious regional family we should comprise. Our social, cultural and economic links should be close. As I have mentioned in the past, nothing would be more rewarding than the ability to contribute to their strengthening, provided this happens in a context of justice and understanding.

I am certain that history would reward those Leaders who show the courage to seize this opportunity to achieve the peaceful solution enabling us all to win, which has recently come into sight.

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*. Special Representative of CNRM, the East Timor Nationalist Resistance representative institution, under the leadership of Commander Xanana Gusmão.